

Protecting Rights of Those Exploited by Coercive Trafficking (PROTECT) Act of 2019

**Introduced by: Senators Brown, Cornyn, Klobuchar, Portman, Tillis,
Blumenthal, Feinstein**

One unfortunate and under-addressed aspect of human trafficking is the use of drugs by traffickers to control and exploit vulnerable populations. Data shows that drug use and human trafficking are intrinsically connected, and in the midst of the current opioid epidemic, we are seeing criminals across the country use this connection to their advantage.

The use of drugs to facilitate human trafficking compounds the trauma experienced by victims of human trafficking and undermines recovery efforts for individuals suffering from addiction. Traffickers introduce or exploit substance abuse as a means to psychologically and physically control their victims.

In some cases, human traffickers force or coerce victims to use drugs, creating or furthering dependency, as a means of forcing the victims into prostitution or domestic servitude. In other cases, human traffickers – with the promise of drugs to individuals already struggling with substance abuse – keep victims trapped in a cycle of addiction. As a result, the victims’ drug dependency is exploited as a means to “pay” for the drugs provided to them.

PROTECT Act of 2019

This legislation amends existing human trafficking law to specify that the use of drugs or illegal substances to cause a person to engage in a commercial sex act or forced labor constitutes a form of coercion. Under this new provision, both traffickers and facilitators of human trafficking are held accountable for causing and or furthering an individual’s addiction for the purpose of forced labor and sex trafficking.

Preventing Criminalization of Victims Trafficking

This legislation utilizes a survivor-informed approach to prevent further criminalization of trafficking victims. Recognizing that victims of trafficking are often forced to commit crimes by virtue of their own victimization, the bill includes a defense to protect covered victims of trafficking from prosecution under this provision.

The following organizations support the PROTECT Act of 2019: Fraternal Order of Police, National Narcotic Officers’ Associations’ Coalition (NNOAC), National Sheriffs’ Association, Federal Law Enforcement Officers’ Association, International Union of Police Associations, Institute to Address Commercial Sexual Exploitation, National District Attorneys Association, Ohio Fraternal Order of Police, Truckers Against Trafficking, Shared Hope International, Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CAT-W), Living In Freedom Together (LIFT), National Center on Sexual Exploitation, Child Welfare League of America, Love 146, My Life My Choice, Rights4Girls, Human Service Chamber of Franklin County